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THE COWBOY RESCUERS IN CUBA.

By COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



HANDSOME MATT MOWBRAY DASHED AWAY TO OBEY HIS LEADER'S ORDERS.

The Cowboy Rescuers in Cuba:

OR,

THE PATRIOT PILOT.

A Story of Sublime Devotion and
Sacrifice in the Great Struggle
for Freedom.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

UNDER SENTENCE OF DEATH.

"The boy shall die on the morrow! I swear it by the cross, *senorita*!"

"Is there no hope for him, *Senor Colonel Bartello*?"

"Yes."

"What is it, for he or I will gladly make any sacrifice in our power."

"Well said, and see that you eat not your words, *Senorita Lucita Agramonte*, though I see no reason why you should do so."

"What will save Harry, my unfortunate young brother, from being shot on the morrow, for if act of mine can spare his life, gladly will I do anything to save him."

"As you know, he did not come here to aid the patriot cause of Cuba, but to save my brother, Rafael, and myself from Spanish hate."

"Because Brother Rafael was a Boy Patriot in the Ten Years' War, you Spaniards never forgave him, though he sought a home in Texas."

"He came here to marry the maiden he loved, *Stella Aguilar*, and then made his home in Cuba once more; but alas! with the breaking out of this war both Rafael and myself were made prisoners and held in the Mountain Fort, by your influence, I verily believe."

"And a band of accursed Americans landed on this coast and rescued him, and you, though you did not get away in the filibuster steamer that brought them."

"No; I remained, and am now in your power; but those who came to the rescue were brave Texas cowboys, who were rangers under my brother Rafael, for when we lived in Texas they made him their captain."

"They came to rescue him, and did so, but as I was left behind, my young brother Harry came back, at the risk of his life, to save me, if in his power."

"You discovered my retreat in the home of *Mendoza*, the overseer of my brother Rafael's plantation, and you found poor Harry, and have us both in your power, here in this beautiful mansion, the estate Rafael got by his marriage."

"You and your soldiers occupy it now, and Harry and I are your prisoners, along with Overseer *Mendoza*, his wife, and child, whose only crime is that they befriended me."

"Now you tell me that Spanish law condemns my brother, yes, and *Mendoza* too, to death on the morrow."

"Harry is an American, as I am, for we were born at the home our father found in Texas as a Cuban exile, and our mother was an American, and the United States will make Spain answer if you harm a hair of his dear young head."

"Bah! The Americans won't fight! Woe unto them if they do go to war with Spain!"

"American though you are, and your brother, too, you are both in my power, and he must answer with his life for landing upon Cuban soil as he did."

"But he came to try and save me, not to join the Cuban patriots."

"It matters not. He came, is here, and must suffer the penalty."

"But you said that there was one chance for his life."

"I did."

"Will you tell me what that one chance is?"

"If in your power to do so, you will save him?"

"Yes, gladly."

"You well know, *Senorita Lucita*, that I have loved you ever since you came here from the United States, with your brother and his Cuban wife."

"And do you dare tell me of your hateful love in the very face of the awful fate you have pronounced upon my poor young brother, *Senor Colonel Blanco Bartello*? And you claiming to be a Spanish gentleman?" and *Lucita Agramonte's* beautiful eyes flashed with indignation as she turned them upon the dark, handsome face of the Spanish colonel, who, with his soldiers, were quartered in the handsome mansion of the Wild Flower Plantation, in the beautiful but war-ridden land of Cuba.

"All is fair, *senorita*, in love and war, it is said. I love you, and I have asked you to be my wife."

"And I refused such an offer from you, the foe of my people, and one who now in revenge has condemned my brother, a mere boy, to death."

"A boy in years, yes, but I am told that he made a great record for himself as the bugler of the Texas Cowboy Rangers, which your brother Rafael once commanded, and now, I am also informed, are commanded by your American lover, who dared land with his accursed Clan of Wild Riders, to rescue their former leader and yourself."

"And they did it well, though I did not reach the steamer."

"I only hope that they will land again, for not one of them ever would escape."

"I hope they will not come again," sadly responded *Lucita Agramonte*.

"Your brother Rafael escaped, yes, but the Boy Bugler remained to try and save you, I believe—or he came back here again to make the attempt, which I do not know."

"But, he is here, and shall die at parade to-morrow, if you do not save him."

"Alas! how can I?"

"By becoming my wife, *Lucita Agramonte*," was the low and earnest response of the Spanish colonel.

CHAPTER II.

LUCITA'S SACRIFICE.

The opening chapter has given the reader an insight into the scene and characters of my story, an American girl and her young brother, whose father, a Cuban of prominence, a general in the Ten Years' War, had become an exile in Texas and married a second time, the mother of the two unfortunates who had fallen into the hands of a cruel Spanish officer.

In the home of their half-brother, Rafael, and his Cuban wife, they were held prisoners, along with the overseer and his family, who had befriended them.

And now, with her boy brother, Hotspur Harry, as he was known to the Texas cowboys, under sentence of death, to die on the morrow, *Lucita Agramonte* was told that she alone could save his life, and by her self-sacrifice—becoming the wife of the Spanish colonel, *Blanco Bartello*.

Was it a wonder that her beautiful face became the hue of the dead, and she sank in her chair almost in a swoon?

She recalled her one friend in Cuba among the Spaniards, *Colonel Alfredo Delrossa*.

He was also a former lover, but a noble man, and had been ordered to Havana by the secret working of *Colonel Bartello*, so could not aid her, or Harry.

Her thoughts turned upon her brother Rafael, and his wife, rescued and carried back to Texas by the filibuster steamer.

She thought of the man she loved, dashing, handsome *Charlie Chase*, a Texan rancher, and captain of the gallant Cowboy Clan. He, alas! could not aid her, though in her heart she knew that the Cowboy Filibusters were going to again land and attempt to rescue her and her young brother.

But, the morrow was close at hand, and Harry was condemned to die.

In utter despair, she knew not what to do, what to say.

And there she sat, her heart and brain torn by conflicting thoughts, until, suddenly, her face grew hard and stern—strangely so, for one so young and lovely, and, rising, she stepped up to the table before which the Spanish officer sat, and said, in a voice singularly harsh and severe:

"I accept your terms for my brother's life, *Colonel Blanco Bartello*, but I am to name certain conditions."

"Let me know what they are, *senorita*," he answered, while a look of malignant triumph gleamed in his dark eyes.

"You have said that my brother's life or death rests with me?"

"It does."

"You have asked me to be your wife?"

"I have."

"If I accept you will spare my brother?"

"I will."

"If I refuse you will put him to death upon the morrow, though he is a mere boy and an American."

"A boy that plays a man's part most thoroughly. That he is an American I care not, only it causes me to hate him the more."

"Yet I, too, am an American."

"You are a woman. A Spanish gentleman never wars with women; and I love you. You are a very lovely woman, *Lucita Agramonte*, and I can forgive your being an American."

"Because I am rich, and you love my gold. Is not that it?"

The face of the Spaniard flushed, but he replied:

"Do not put it upon the plea of riches, but what it really is—love for you."

"And I hate you."

"I will teach you to love me."

"You will teach me but to hate you the more."

"I'll chance that, once you are my wife."

"And you will take for your wife one who hates you, one of a race you despise?"

"I make you the exception."

"So be it. I will marry you, upon my own conditions, *Senor Colonel*."

"Name them."

"You are to spare my brother's life and give him safe passport out of Cuba."

"I will do so."

"You are to spare the life of *Vance Mendoza*, the overseer, also."

"I will."

"And allow him, his wife, and child to leave Cuba with my brother."

"It shall be done."

"Very well. The day I see them sail away from this land of death under Spanish rule, I will become your wife."

"Do you swear it?"

"I do," was the firm response, and

Lucita Agramonte, almost fainting, dropped back into her chair, while the face of the Spanish officer beamed with triumph.

CHAPTER III.

HOTSPUR HARRY'S PROTEST.

A moment did Lucita Agramonte sit in her chair, as though dazed by the pledge she had made; then she arose quickly, and with an effort to control herself which was successful, she said, with utmost calmness:

"I had hoped for a different life, Colonel Bartello, one of happiness, but Destiny has ordered otherwise.

"I have given you my pledge, and will keep it, while I shall do my duty and give you no cause for complaint against me, yet I do not, cannot love you and never will.

"Now that you have my word, I beg you to send for my brother and tell him he is to be spared, and he can bear the news to his fellow-sufferer, Mendoza.

"But, Colonel Bartello, I beseech you not to let Harry know why you do not have him shot, for I know it would be but another blow to him, to crush his proud young spirit."

"I will send for him and you shall tell him," was the answer.

An orderly was called, and the young Texan and also the overseer were sent for.

In a short while they came, wearing irons on wrists and ankles, that clanked as they walked.

"You can go, orderly."

"I will see that the prisoners are safe," said the Spaniard.

The two prisoners were left standing before the man who held their fate in his hands.

The one was a large man, with a dark, kindly face, and his mother having been an American, was sufficient to win the hate of Colonel Bartello, especially as his father was a Cuban.

He was Vance Mendoza, the overseer of the Wild Flower Plantation.

The other was a youth, whose sun-browned, bold, and handsome face caused him to look older than he really was.

His form was slender, graceful, and athletic, and he was dressed in a suit that with top boots, leggings, velvet jacket, and sombrero, was a mixture of Mexican and rancher garb that was very picturesque.

As his eyes fell upon his sister, he gave her a look of reproach, and said:

"Ah, sister! are you in the presence of this man to plead for my life?"

She did not reply, and the Spaniard answered for her:

"She has asked for your life, and I have granted it.

"You, with your fellow-prisoner there, and his wife and child, are to sail from the nearest seaport by the first outbound vessel, and if you dare again to set foot upon Cuban soil, it will cost you your life."

"If duty calls me here again, I'll take all chances, Senor Bartello.

"I am an American, and if my death at your hands would force my Government to check Spain in her barbarism on this island, and gain Cuban independence, I would be content to sacrifice it."

"You talk too boldly, young man.

"Beware, or you may rue your words!"

"I speak as I feel, and I ask no favors of you, Colonel Bartello."

"Yet I grant one, your life, aye, and

more, for I allow that traitor to go with you, and his family, as well."

"He is no traitor.

"He has long served in the family of my brother's wife, and he simply gave my sister a haven, when she was left upon the island when we landed to rescue those dear to us.

"You found my sister in the care of Mendoza and his wife, and he must suffer for it."

"Enough!

"I have spared him."

"And on what terms?" suddenly cried the youth, his face paling.

"It is sufficient that I have spared you."

"It is not, for you have not said that my sister is to go with us."

"Your sister has decided to remain."

"It is not so."

"It is."

"Speak, Sister Lucita, and say that this man does not tell the truth."

With perfect calmness Lucita replied:

"I will remain here in Cuba, Harry."

"For what reason?"

"It is best that I should."

"Never! What, remain here at the villa, with Mendoza and his wife gone, and no one to protect you? It must not be."

"I am here, young man, and will see to her protection."

"You! I'd as soon leave her in the coils of a snake as under your protection, Blanco Bartello."

The Spaniard sprang to his feet, while Lucita uttered a cry of terror.

"Oh, Harry, do not say more. Your life has been spared, as has been that of Mendoza, and you must leave the island."

"I fear that our lives have been spared, Senorita Lucita, at your sacrifice," said Mendoza, sadly; and he added, firmly:

"I prefer death to your sacrificing yourself, dear young lady."

"It shall not be!

"I see it all now, Sister Lucita! You have made terms with this Spaniard to save us."

"I have promised to become his wife, for—"

"It shall not be! I tell you, Blanco Bartello. I wish you to have me shot, as arranged for, on the morrow. Well, I know that my sister will gladly die rather than wed you, a Spaniard and—"

But, springing forward, Lucita stopped his further words by placing her hand upon his lips.

"I rule here, Senor American, and my plans shall be carried out in my own way. Orderly!"

The youth seemed about to spring upon the Spaniard and strike him with his chains, but Lucita grasped him, with a force that he could not throw off, and just then the orderly came in.

"Take these prisoners away, and cut them down with your machete if they attempt resistance."

"Si, senor!" answered the orderly, and the youth and the man were led away, Lucita following them, for she did not know what her daring young brother might do to get himself into further trouble.

"I will see you again in the morning, Colonel Bartello," she said, as she left the room, and the Spaniard simply bowed.

He knew that he was master there.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RIVAL SPANIARDS.

Hardly had the prisoners, followed by Lucita, left the spacious and handsomely furnished library where Colonel

Bartello had quartered himself in the villa, when an officer came in from another door.

The Spanish colonel was in an ugly mood, to judge by his face, but he said, with a show of politeness:

"Ah, Senor Major Valdos, be seated, and tell me how I can serve you?"

The one he addressed was a striking looking man, in the uniform of a major of Spanish cavalry.

His dark face, black hair and eyes showed that he was of the Spanish race.

A handsome man he was, yet with a look in his face that was cruel and stern.

His uniform was new and elegant, and was most becoming, setting off his fine figure well.

He did not take the seat to which Colonel Bartello motioned him, but approaching the table and facing him, said:

"Colonel Bartello, my room adjoins this one, as you know, and I have therefore overheard all that has passed in here."

"Your name was not mentioned, Don Ruiz Valdos, so for once the old adage was not carried out, that eavesdroppers hear nothing good of themselves."

The face of Major Valdos flushed, and a hot reply seemed about to spring from his lips; but instead he responded quietly:

"I was not intentionally an eavesdropper, having retired for the night; but I heard enough to cause me to rise and dress myself, to have a talk with you."

"Well, senor, it is growing late, so how can I serve you?" somewhat impatiently.

"By calmly listening to what I have to say."

"I will do so."

"I do not care to tire you with what is ancient history, but you know I went to the United States to live?"

"When exiled from Spain and Cuba some years ago, yes."

"The term of my exile has ended.

"I went to Mexico, then into Texas, and became a ranchero there.

"I was regarded as a Mexican, who had become an American citizen, and I so let it go, for I allied myself with the best people there.

"I had a fine ranch, and became an officer in a band known as the Texas Cowboys Clan, who were rangers, banded together for mutual protection against Indians and outlaws.

"The first captain of this clan was Rafael Agramonte, but when he came to Cuba to live, after marrying the fair owner of this plantation, an ex-United States naval officer, who had turned rancher, was made captain."

"To what does all this tend, Senor Don?"

"You shall soon discover. It was the second captain, Charlie Chase, who learned that Rafael Agramonte and his sister Lucita had been imprisoned in Cuba, and organized the expedition to rescue them.

"Rafael Agramonte was taken from your fort, by these Texan cowboys, and with his wife, who was still here at her home, left on the filibuster steamer; but his sister went to the overseer's house and was left behind.

"Another expedition was to be organized, and, as I was in the service of the captain general secretly, to prevent expeditions, I was suspected and fled for my life.

"I came to Cuba, and the captain general gave me my rank in the army again, and ordered me to the regiment of which you had been made colonel.

"But I wish to have you understand

now that the Senorita Lucita Agramonte I regard as the one who is to become my wife."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, Senor Colonel, for I have loved her ever since I met her in Texas, and she is to one day become my wife."

"Ha! this sounds strange, for I was told that she was engaged to the very man you now named, the captain of that accursed Clan of Cowboy Filibusters, Charlie Chase, a Texan rancher."

"He loves her, yes, but I stand between him and his love."

"With the consent of the Senorita Agramonte?"

"That is of as little consequence with me as was her hate expressed for you awhile since in your case."

"By Heaven! I was sure that you held no just claim upon her heart or hand, Don Ruiz Valdos."

"Equally as just as do you, Senor Colonel Blanco Bartello."

"It is not true, for I have bought her hand, as you must know, having listened to what passed, with the life of her brother."

"That will not stand, if reported to the captain general."

"By you?"

"Unless you come to my terms, yes."

"What are your terms?"

"You are to fight for your fair prize, Senor Colonel."

"That means a duel with you?"

"It does."

"I am to kill you to win my prize?"

"Yes, or I am to kill you to win her, and also step into your boots as colonel of the regiment."

"Major Don Ruiz Valdos, you are as finished a villain as it was ever my misfortune to meet."

"Present company excepted Senor Colonel," sneered Valdos.

Unheeding the interruption, Colonel Bartello continued:

"But I waive all that you are, and will fight you for the prize to-morrow, so arrange to have your second meet mine."

Valdos smiled, bowed, and left the room.

CHAPTER V.

THE FILIBUSTER STEAMER.

While the rival Spanish officers were discussing with such devilish courtesy their deadly duello for the morrow, the regiment encamped not far from the villa had become lost in deep repose.

The sentinels at the villa paced to and fro upon their beats, the guard were napping not far distant, and the duel having been arranged, the rival officers had retired to their respective sleeping quarters, to get what rest they could to steady their nerves for the combat.

In her own room, Lucita Agramonte paced the floor like a caged lioness, her quadroon maid, Flora, lying asleep upon a rug by the window.

Lucita had heard the ultimatum of her brother and Mendoza, that they would be shot, and not accept her sacrifice.

But she was plotting then to see that they were saved, be her fate what it might.

"If Captain Chase would only come to-night in his swift steamer, the Mustang, then they would not die and the sacrifice would not have to be made," she murmured.

In the room in which they were confined, with a sentinel at the door, the two prisoners talked together in low tones, but there was no shrinking from the ordeal in either one.

Upon the plateau, where stood the

overseer's home, occupied by Spanish soldiers, and with the negro quarters beyond, a sentinel rode about, to keep a watch of the coast and gulf.

But was he half asleep, or was his eyesight failing him? Had his ears lost their acuteness of hearing?

It was storming, for the wind blew fiercely, though off shore, and far out the waves were running high; yet, upon them was a dark object that the sentinel, catching sight of, would have known to be a steamer, while, as she came into stiller water, the churning of propeller would have told that she was being hard driven toward the dark shores of Cuba.

The craft was a long one, gaunt as a greyhound in build, lying low in the water, and with her smokestacks raking, as did her two masts.

She was rushing along at a twenty-knot speed, having just been having a hard fight with the waves, a league off shore.

Not a light was visible on her from stem to stern.

No smoke streamed from her smokestacks, and her intention was evidently, to gain a secret haven unseen.

Dark as it was, her decks presented a strange appearance, for amidships were grouped a large number of horses, saddled and bridled, and at the head of each stood a man, calming the animal he held, and steadying them in the rough sea, while in showers the spray flew over them.

Upon the bridge stood three persons, one of them, the sturdy captain of the steamer, with his hand upon the bell, to check her speed and run for it, did the steamer dash upon a Spanish cruiser, for, as the reader has guessed, the craft was running the deadly blockade into the island, whose brave people were struggling for Cuba Libre.

Another person on the bridge had his eyes shaded from the flying spray, and was peering ahead into the gloom, while now and then he said in a low tone:

"Steady as you are—port your helm—steady!"

At last came the words:

"I have the bearings now. We are pointing directly for the laguna, captain."

"All right! In she goes!" answered the captain to Taos, the Cuban pilot.

Then, turning to the third person on the bridge, and who wore a sombrero and cloak, he said:

"I think we will find all the Spanish cruisers in harbor on a night like this, Captain Chase."

"It is to be hoped so. But, we'll chance all others if we do not find that one has sought a harbor in the lagoon."

"That would be bad, indeed, sir; but, there rises a light."

"It is in the Wild Flower Villa," averred Captain Chase, and he added:

"At first I thought it was a signal, for I do not understand why Hotspur Harry, our brave Boy Bugler, does not show the signals agreed upon."

"I hope it is not because he has been captured, Captain Chase," the pilot said.

"I sincerely trust not, but, if so, he must be rescued."

"I will go aft and tell the Senor Agramonte and his wife that we are all right now for the lagoon," and Captain Chase descended from the bridge and made his way aft.

Those he sought were not on deck, and tapping upon the companionway, he called out:

"Lower the lamp, Rafael, while I come in."

It was done, and, entering, he closed

the door behind him, the lamp being again raised.

The light revealed a pleasant cabin, and seated at a table were two persons.

One was in the dress of a Texan rancher, and yet his dark face revealed his Cuban birth. It was Rafael Agramonte, a Boy Patriot in the Ten Years' War, and an aide, then, on his father's staff.

A fine specimen of true manhood he was, for revealed in every feature was his noble nature.

By him sat a beautiful Cuban woman, scarcely over twenty—his Cuban wife, Stella Aguilar, she had been, and Wild Flower Villa and Plantation had been her inheritance from her dead parents.

She was dressed in a close-fitting jacket, short skirt, leather leggings, and a sombrero, as though she were prepared for the saddle or a tramp upon landing.

"I came to tell you that Taos has found his bearings, though it is dark as Erebus, and if we do not discover a Spanish cruiser in the lagoon, we will land in less than half an hour, Rafael."

"Good, Charlie! and we are ready; but no signals were set?"

"None."

"I hope it does not forbode evil of Harry."

"I trust not, indeed; but we will soon know. There is a light up at the villa, and it will not take us long after we land to strike our blow and know the truth," and as Stella Agramonte again lowered the lamp, the captain of the Cowboy Clan left the cabin, to return to the bridge once more.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOLD-UP IN THE DARK.

As no Spanish cruiser harbored in the lagoon, the filibuster steamer Mustang glided safely in unseen by Spanish eyes, and soon moored alongside of the bank. Then gangplanks were run out for the landing of the wiry ponies and their daring riders.

Half an hour after the black night was illumined by the flashing of repeating rifles and revolvers, and mingling with the rattle of the firearms were the wild yells of the Texans, as they rode over the Spanish guard and dashed upon the villa.

Fierce and fatal was the fighting, for, though outnumbered, the Cowboy Clan did not care for any foes they might meet, and they were not long in rescuing Hotspur Harry, Mendoza and his family, with Lucita and her quadroon maid, and sending them to join Rafael Agramonte, who, with his wife and some thirty of the cowboys, awaited for the word of success, that they might dash away to the mountains and reach the camp of Gomez, in the mountains, for they were to remain in Cuba, once Captain Chase had Lucita and Harry out of Spanish hands.

In the darkness a horseman had dashed up where the little band was waiting and cried:

"To the mountains with all speed, Captain Rafael, for Captain Chase has rescued the Senorita Lucita, her brother, and the overseer's family, who were also prisoners!"

"Bravo! bid them good-by for us, and—"

But the horseman was gone, back toward the villa again, and Rafael Agramonte, with his wife, cowboy followers, and the pack animals they had brought with them, dashed away in the darkness, to take the mountain trail, for they well knew that in a short while other Spanish troops would be on the scene.

Hardly had Rafael Agramonte left when the horseman who had brought the word to him of success, and had ordered him to fly, halted in the dark woodland through which ran the road, and called out in Spanish:

"Are you here, men?"

"Yes, señor," answered a voice.

"All right! They must soon be along—ha! I hear them now!"

As he uttered the word, the sound of hoofs was heard, and, a couple of moments after, five horses, with riders, appeared in the gloom.

"Is that you, Hotspur?" called out the man lurking in the shadows.

"Yes, and my sister, and others with me. Who are you, and where is Rafael, for we were told we would find him awaiting here to say good-by before he went on to the mountains?" answered Harry.

"Rafael Agramonte and his gang have gone, and—you are all my prisoners!"

"Seize them, men!"

It was a complete surprise.

Neither Hotspur nor Mendoza had yet been freed of their chains, and they were not armed.

Both Lucita and Senora Mendoza were helpless to resist or to escape, though the former did have a revolver.

Still, she dared not use it, as others might suffer for her act.

Taos, the pilot, was with them. He was armed and ready to resist.

It was too dark to see, there in the dense foliage, but Hotspur called out:

"We are helpless, Taos; but do you escape with the news. The Cowboy Clan can soon rescue us."

Taos did make the effort, but he was felled by a blow on the head with a revolver.

"Bind him, men, and bring all on after me. We must not be found by those accursed Americans," said the same stern voice that had given all orders thus far.

"I know that voice," cried Hotspur Harry, but he found himself in rude hands, a heavy hand over his mouth, and sharp came the words:

"The one that calls for help or speaks, woman or man, shall be shot without mercy."

The party were hastened along upon the horses they were mounted on, further and further from the road, and when at last they came out into an open space, Hotspur Harry was able to see by the starlight that their party was all there, Taos being held between two soldiers.

He also saw that there were half a dozen Spaniards there, and how utterly useless the attempt to escape would have been, in irons, as was Mendoza and himself, and with Taos alone capable of resistance, until dealt the severe blow that had felled him.

One more thing did Hotspur Harry see. There stood the one who had led in their capture.

Even in the starlight he knew that tall form, could see enough of the dark face to recognize it, for he had already discovered that he was in Cuba, but held high rank in the Spanish army, was, next to Colonel Bartello in command of the forces stationed in and about the Wild Flower Villa.

It was Don Ruiz Valdós, the man who had been one of the Cowboy Clan in Texas, and whose revenge in Cuba could be dealt most severely upon those whom he hated, for, when suspected of treachery to his comrades, Captain Chase had determined to bring the Don before the Cowboy Rangers for trial, but he had made his escape.

Now Hotspur knew that to look for mercy from him, when he was in power, would be useless.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THEIR MERCY.

The gallant Texas cowboys had won victory, but to lose it later.

They had secured Lucita and Hotspur Harry, and those with them, from the Spaniards, and then, believing that they had gone to the vessel, had begun their retreat.

Still thinking that the rescued party were on the steamer, for with the dead and wounded and horses on the deck, while the Gatling guns were still firing, it had been impossible to find out just what the situation was. Captain Chase had backed out of the lagoon, the sea now lighted by the overseer's home, in flames.

Then upon the cliff had appeared a cloaked form, who no one knew, and hailing the steamer, Captain Chase was told that Hotspur Harry and his party had been cut off in their retreat to the Mustang, so had gone to the mountains with Rafael Agramonte.

Little did he know that the one who hailed the Mustang was Don Ruiz Valdós, the traitor to the clan, and that he then had Hotspur Harry and his party prisoners.

Nor did he know that Don Ruiz had set the home of the overseer on fire, that a good view of the steamer might be had, while it would be a signal to bring Spanish cruisers from up and down the coast, to go in chase of the daring craft.

The steamer hailed, his lie told, Don Ruiz ran to where his horse had been left, mounted, and dashed away to the spot where his prisoners were still kept in the woods.

"The steamer got away, and will escape unless the cruisers capture her. But, now we will return to the villa; and, men, if you find a wounded cowboy, kill him," ordered Don Ruiz, upon his return.

"This man is dying, Senor Major," said one of the Spaniards, and he gave Taos, the pilot, a kick, as he lay upon the ground, breathing hard, for he had not spoken since his attempt to escape and the blow he had been dealt, while his captor had fairly carried him in the retreat from the highway.

"Put a bullet in him and leave him," was the cruel command.

The Spanish soldier obeyed, for he drew a revolver, pointed it down upon the pilot, and fired.

There was a convulsive drawing up of the limbs, and Taos lay motionless.

"Coward!" hissed Hotspur Harry, in the face of Don Ruiz.

"Yes, you are a coward, indeed, Don Ruiz Valdós," cried Lucita.

The Spanish major laughed, and, giving the order to move, the party started for the villa.

The burning overseer's home lighted up the way, when they struck the road, and Vance Mendoza said, sadly:

"There goes our home, Nina, where we have passed many happy days."

"Yes," chokingly replied the Cuban wife.

As they reached the immediate grounds surrounding the villa, a glimpse of the sea was obtained.

There was seen the Mustang, flying along like a racer over the storm-swept waters, while from up and down the coast had come Spanish cruisers, to give chase, and their bow guns were firing upon the fleet steamer.

"They'll not catch her, Valdós, any

more than you did the Cowboy Rangers, in fact, I don't think you were anxious to get very near your old Texas comrades, for you did none of the fighting," said Hotspur Harry, derisively, to the Don.

The latter's dark face flushed at the words, but he said:

"As your life or death hangs upon my word, I would advise that you keep a civil tongue between your teeth, boy."

"I never take advice from a villain," curtly responded the young Texan.

"I advise you do so in this instance, for your sister's sake."

Hotspur Harry was silenced at once.

But Lucita said:

"You may seal Harry's lips, from fear of harm to me, Don Ruiz Valdós, but that does not prevent my telling you that I know you to be a coward and as treacherous as a snake, while you are equally as devoid of mercy."

"That is the wrong way, Senorita Agramonte, to win favor at my hands."

"I do not seek favors from you."

The Spanish major uttered an oath, but said no more, and soon after they began to ride over the scene of the fight about the villa.

Dead and wounded Spanish soldiers were seen scattered about, for the still burning house rendered all as bright as day.

As they moved on among the dead and wounded soldiers, a form was seen that Hotspur Harry recognized at a glance.

It was one of the Cowboy Couriers, wounded and overlooked in the retreat in the darkness of his comrades.

He half raised himself as he saw the party, and, recognizing the situation, called out:

"My God, Hotspur, I thought you had all escaped!"

They were the last words he ever uttered, for Don Ruiz leveled his revolver, pulling trigger, and with the report the Texan fell back dead.

"Coward!" cried Hotspur Harry.

"There will come a day of reckoning for you."

The Spaniard did not reply, but cast a quick glance at Lucita, in whose face he saw both scorn and hatred for his act.

A few minutes later the party rode up to the villa, and there stood Colonel Bartello, his face livid, while he was snapping out his orders to his still frightened soldiers.

"Great God! Don Ruiz!"

"Did they not escape after all?"

"No, but they would have done so but for me, so I claim them as my prisoners now."

"I still command here, Major Valdós," cried Bartello, hotly.

"Yes, but I am next in rank, and the morrow will show if I do not step into your rank," was the significant reply, and which Colonel Blanco Bartello well understood.

CHAPTER VIII.

TAOS, THE CUBAN PILOT.

Taos, the pilot, had not been so badly hurt as he had made out by the blow which stopped his escape.

The pistol barrel had cut a gash a couple of inches long in his scalp, over one ear, and the blow had been a stunning one. But, Taos had quickly rallied, and began at once to "play possum."

When the two soldiers seized him, they had fairly to drag him along, and when the halt was made, he had dropped in a heap, as though wholly helpless.

Then he had writhed and tried to appear as though he was a dying man.

He went through the apparent death struggle well, and intended to carry it out to the end, then pretending to be dead.

And it would have taken much, indeed, to show that he was not really so, had he been put to the test.

Instead, however, Major Valdés having ridden rapidly away, to see what was going on, had set the overseer's home on fire, and then had appeared upon the cliff to let those on the steamer believe that he was a Cuban friend, and would let Captain Chase know that the prisoners then in his grasp had escaped to the mountains with Rafael Agramonte, his wife, and thirty cowboys.

In this he had been successful, and, returning to his prisoners, as has been seen, he gave the cruel order to one of his men to send a bullet into the body of the pilot.

Taos heard the order, yet did not move. He brought his wonderful nerve to his aid. He knew if the bullet did not kill him, if he moved that was the end. So he chanced the shot, and his iron nerve stood by him.

The shot was fired, but the Spanish soldier aimed not at his body, but his head.

The bullet glanced on the side of the skull, immediately opposite where the revolver barrel had cut a gash in his scalp.

And the bullet did no more. It glanced on the skull, cut a gash in the scalp, and buried itself in the ground.

It was a terrible shock, fired at such close proximity, and yet it did not stun the pilot.

He moved convulsively, and then lay still. The Spaniards and all others believed that he had been killed.

The major, with his prisoners, then moved off toward the villa.

Taos heard them going, for he did not dare open his eyes.

His head was aching from the blows, but he felt that the bullet had done him no serious harm, unless it had fractured the skull.

The moment the party passed on, he placed his hand upon the wound, to find that the skull was intact.

Then he felt the other side. That also showed no fracture.

"I always was hard headed," he muttered.

He attempted to rise, but was so dizzy that at first he could not do so.

Still he must get away, in case the Spaniards returned. So he crawled along on hands and knees until he grew less dizzy; then he arose to his feet.

Going forward, he came to where he could see the sea and the burning home.

There was the Mustang flying away silently, under the fire of the Spaniards in chase.

"You never catch her," he muttered.

Then he thought of his own condition, left there by his comrades.

"The others are far worse, for I at least am free," he consoled himself.

He knew the plantation and its grounds thoroughly, and there came to him the thought of a hiding place.

Remembering that Hotspur Harry, when he had come ahead of the cowboys to reconnoitre, had been taken by Mendoza to a safe hiding place, and which he also knew, he decided to go there.

"Hotspur Harry hid there for weeks, and his traps and provisions were left there, surely, as there was no reason to bring them away. It is in a cave up a glen, and I can find it."

With this he was turning to go, when he stumbled over a dead body.

It was a Spanish soldier, for he saw the uniform buttons glancing in the firelight. The man was dead, from a bullet wound in his head.

He also had his weapons, and Taos could see that he was a sergeant of cavalry.

"I will need this uniform, I guess, so I'll take it," he decided.

Quickly, boots, uniform, and hat were appropriated, and the body was dropped over the bluff into the sea.

With his bundle of clothing, the pilot hastened along the cliff until he came to a place where a road led to the beach.

He knew that it was the road leading to the lagoon, where the cowboys had landed.

The road had dead Spaniards along it here and there.

"I guess I'd better be on the safe side," muttered the pilot, and he drew on the uniform over his own clothes.

He also took the weapons of another dead Spaniard, and as he did so found a belt about his waist, heavy with gold, as feeling it determined.

Having been robbed by his Spanish captor, this was a lucky find for him.

Several times he shrank out of sight in the bushes along the road, as a horseman dashed along, coming from or going to the lagoon below.

But he reached the beach, and, avoiding the Spaniards gathered at the lagoon, where a hot fight had occurred, he skulked along the shore until he reached the entrance to the glen, and, turning into it, soon reached the cave he was hoping to find shelter in.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPANISH SENTINEL.

Worn out, and suffering, Taos dropped down in the entrance to the cave and went to sleep.

When he awoke the sun was shining brightly, and the storm had blown over. He at once began to look about him.

The cave was not a deep one, but it was a dry, secure retreat in the rocky bluff at the head of the glen.

The pilot's head was aching, and he was glad to slip down to a small rivulet and bathe his wounds, and bind them up, as best he could with strips torn from his handkerchief.

Much refreshed, he returned to the cave, and the sun penetrating it now, he beheld a roll of blankets left there by Hotspur Harry, a pile of wood to build a fire, several lanterns, some cooking utensils, and a box of provisions hanging upon the wall.

There was also a lasso and a machete, with a few other things.

Glancing over the contents of the bag, he said:

"Enough to last me a week. I am indeed in luck."

Then, to his delight, he discovered a small bottle of witch hazel oil, the very thing for his wound, with lint and bandages, all that he needed.

Going down the glen, still wearing the sergeant's uniform over his own clothing, the pilot crept near enough to see the lagoon, and observe that the Spaniards had removed the wounded, and were burying the dead.

The horses slain they were dragging to the bank and throwing into the lagoon to be carried off on the tide.

Back to his retreat then went Taos, and filling his canteen and a bucket at the rivulet, he prepared his breakfast.

A strong cup of coffee revived him, and he then put out the little fire he had built, fearing that the smoke might be seen.

Thus the day passed away, and again dressing his wound toward night, he then built a fire and cooked his supper, eating heartily.

A good night's rest made him feel like another man, for his head had stopped aching, though his two wounds were yet sore, but having bound them up tightly they were beginning to heal.

"I'll play Spanish sergeant to-night and have a look about me," he said.

When night came on he slipped away from the glen and approached the villa, as near as he dare go.

After a couple of hours spent in reconnoitering, he made the discovery that a single sentinel was kept on duty at the plantation gate entering the ornamental grounds about the villa.

It was over a quarter of a mile to the villa, and the sentinel stood at the marine gateway, while his horse was hitched near.

"To-morrow night that horse is mine," muttered the pilot, as he returned to his retreat.

Knowing the ground well, as he did, the next night he flanked the sentinel and approached boldly from the direction of the villa.

He had discovered that a strong guard was kept down at the lagoon, and another at the ruins of the overseer's house, so that a filibuster could not run in without being seen.

There was also a Spanish cruiser anchored off the mouth of the lagoon.

Approaching the sentinel boldly, the spurs on his heels, and his sabre rattling, the pilot was promptly halted when near him.

"The sergeant of the guard on his rounds," said the pilot, who had seen much of military life.

At once the sentinel was disarmed of all fears at the answer, and the fact that the one he challenged appeared to come directly from the villa.

Advancing, with his revolver in his hand, he suddenly thrust it into the face of the sentinel, and said in Spanish:

"One word, one movement, and you are a dead man!"

The sentinel was terribly frightened, and submitted to being disarmed and securely bound with the lasso, which the pilot had brought from the cave with him.

But not yet satisfied, the pilot also gagged him beyond all power of utterance.

Approaching the horse, hitched near, the pilot said, sternly:

"Mount, and I will aid you."

The soldier obeyed and was made to sit in the rear of the saddle.

Then Taos mounted, taking the saddle, and the horse with his double load was at once started for the mountain road, the same that Rafael Agramonte had taken with his party.

Taos knew the country well, and once or twice turned off sharply into a hiding place as he heard a troop of cavalry going along the highway.

Once well away from the coast, he rode more rapidly, and soon after midnight began to ascend a mountain road, to be suddenly brought to a standstill by the sharp challenge:

"Halt!"

"Espanol, or Cuba Libre?"

"Cuba Libre!" responded the pilot, in a decided tone.

"Advance!"

The pilot obeyed, and he found himself in the midst of half a dozen men who covered him with their rifles, while one said:

"Now who and what are you?"

CHAPTER X.

IN THE PATRIOT CAMP.

"I am a Cuban, Andrea Taos by name, and I am here to see Senor Rafael Agramonte, while I have with me a Spanish prisoner."

So Taos answered the challenge of the sentinel, and was at once taken in charge by a mounted guard and led on toward the Cuban headquarters.

On the way other outposts were found, showing that the Cubans could not be surprised, while each guard was stronger as they neared headquarters, and the road grew more and more difficult of travel.

There was a light burning in the headquarters cottage, and going there a council of leading officers was found to be in progress.

There sat Gomez, grizzly, hardened by exposure, with piercing eye, wiry form, and quick and energetic in spite of his three-score years and ten, and life of hardship and danger.

Maceo was there, well built, strong, dark-hued, a mulatto, but courteous, gentlemanly and the face and bearing of a man born to lead.

Other men whose names are on every lip were there also, and all dressed in their simple uniform of the Cuban patriots.

Among them, in the attire he had worn as a Texas ranger, was Rafael Agramonte, younger in years than the others, but one who had been a veteran in the Ten Years' War.

Received by his old Texan comrades, he had come to Cuba now to cast his lot with the patriots, and General Gomez had quickly made him a colonel of cavalry, and appointed him to command the scouts of his army, a position his Texas training as cowboy, Indian fighter, and rancher had well fitted him for, especially with the foundation of his service in the famous struggle.

At a glance he recognized the pilot as he entered the room with the guard, the Spanish prisoner being left outside with another Cuban soldier.

"Well, sir, who are you?" asked General Gomez, sternly.

"If your memory fails you, Senor General, it is on account of my bandaged head and hard looks, but that gentleman will vouch for me, senor," and Taos pointed to Rafael.

"Ah! I know you now. You are the pilot who brought me to this island," and General Gomez extended his hand.

"Yes, General Gomez, the one who was pilot of the vessel that brought me in; but why did you not return, my good Taos, for surely the expedition was a grand success?" said Rafael Agramonte.

"In some respects, yes, senor; but in others it was a failure."

Colonel Agramonte was at once struck with a dread of evil, and, turning to the general in chief, said:

"General Gomez, I have related to you all the circumstances of my rescue by the cowboys' clan, and their second landing to rescue my half-brother and sister."

"May I question Pilot Taos here, for I am sure his presence is a sure sign of trouble?"

"Do so, Colonel Agramonte, certainly," replied General Gomez.

"You have not misjudged the situation, Senor Agramonte, for I have much to tell you."

"Surely, the steamer was not lost?"

"Oh, no, senor. She showed a clean pair of heels to the cruiser that tried

to catch her; but the party that were to be rescued did not get away on board the Mustang, senor."

"Oh! My sister! my young brother!"

"We started for the steamer, senor. Captain Chase sent me with them, for there were the Senorita Lucita, Senora Mendoza and her child, Flora, the maid of your sister, and brave young Hotspur Harry and good Mendoza, both of whom were heavily ironed, for they could not then be freed from their manacles."

"I guided them to where we had left you and your party, to say good-by, on our way to the steamer; but you had gone, and in the darkness of the woodland we were suddenly halted and forced to surrender."

"Yet I never left until I was sent word that all was well, and told to dash in."

"The one who brought you that word, Senor Rafael, was none other than your former Texan comrade, and later a traitor, Don Ruiz Valdos."

"Great God! He is in Cuba, then?"

"Yes, senor. I heard enough of what he said to Senor Harry to learn who he was, and he is major of the regiment at Wild Flower Plantation."

"This is too bad, too bad."

"But I always suspected the man of being a Spaniard and not a Mexican, and Captain Chase was sure that he became a Spanish spy in Texas when the present war broke out, and said he would escape and go to Cuba."

"And my sister and brother are his prisoners, good Taos?"

"Yes, senor. I will tell you my story, just as it happened, and I have a soldier of the regiment with me as a prisoner, and I got what information I could from him, but you may get more, for he is either inclined to join the patriots, or he is pretending to do so for fear he'll be killed," and with this Taos, the pilot, told the whole story, and of his narrow escape.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPANIARD'S STORY.

Generals Gomez and Maceo listened with deep interest to the story told by the Cuban pilot, as did Rafael Agramonte, though the heart of the latter was torn by conflicting emotions for the fate of his sister and brother, and the Mendozas.

Taos had also said that he felt sure Captain Chase believed the little party had gone with Rafael Agramonte, or he would not have left them.

He must have supposed they had been cut off and feared to go that way, and he added that the Spanish soldier had said he heard some one hail the Mustang and so report to Captain Chase.

The pilot further stated that he could have made his way to a point on the coast where a Cuban lived who had a staunch boat, which he could have escaped in and made for Key West, to report to Captain Chase the truth of the situation; but he had deemed it his duty to first come and notify Rafael Agramonte of the facts, and then he could go off to the United States and report to the Cowboys Clan Captain.

"You have done just right, my good Taos, and I appreciate all your risk and sufferings."

"Our surgeon here will dress your wounds as they should be, and to-morrow night I will escort you as far back as we dare go, and you can reach the coast and sail for Key West, then go by rail to Texas, though it will be well to wire him to his home to hold the

Mustang, for I well know that he will at once plan another expedition of rescue, which, as he will come, I will give you letters that will enable the Mustang to bring in a good cargo of arms, ammunition and supplies."

"A good idea, Colonel Agramonte," said General Gomez, while General Maceo remarked:

"If we had arms and ammunition for the men already under our flag, we could sweep the Spaniards off this island."

"I will explain the situation, senor, to Captain Chase, and I feel that he will bring a large force of cowboys with him, for you know, Senor Rafael, there are many who wish to fight for Cuba."

"Many indeed, Taos. Why Texans, under that gallant confederate general and late Governor, Ross, could whip Spain alone, without having to call upon a single other State," said Rafael Agramonte, with enthusiasm.

"I would suggest, senor, that you now have a talk with my Spanish prisoner, while I wait where I can hear what he says, to see if he contradicts himself, for he may give you information worth knowing, and he may not."

"A good idea, pilot."

"We will dismiss you, as it were, and call him in," said Gomez.

"Yes, Taos, you are to be my guest, for we have a spare room in our cottage, and senora will be glad to entertain you; but I am going to have you pretend to go there now, but return to overhear what your prisoner says."

With this, Colonel Agramonte walked out with Taos, directed him just how to go to find his cottage, and seeing him start off, told the Spaniard to come with him.

The prisoner did so, and was evidently a very much frightened man.

When he faced the group of Cuban officers he looked furtively about him, and his eyes rested upon no face that he knew.

"You are a Spaniard," said Rafael Agramonte, whom General Gomez had told to question him.

"In part, senor. My father was a Spanish officer; my mother a Cuban girl."

"Who was your father, and where is he?"

"Major Mora, senor, but he is dead."

"I knew him in Santo Domingo," said Gomez.

"He was killed in the Ten Years' War, senor."

"Yes, but your mother?"

"Lives in Santiago Province, senor."

"And you are a Spanish soldier?"

"Yes, senor. My father sent me to Spain to be educated, but at his death we lost all we had, and I enlisted in the army there, and was sent to Cuba; but there was no war when I entered the army, senor, and my term of service was up a month ago, and I would not sign again, for I consider myself a Cuban, though you may not believe me."

"You belong to Colonel Delrossa's command?"

"Now Colonel Blanco Bartello, senor, for Colonel Delrossa was not the man the Captain General wanted in command at this point, and Major Bartello's great influence got his superior ordered to Havana, and himself promoted."

"Colonel Delrossa is a gentleman, senor, and humane, and Colonel Bartello is not."

"You appear to have judged your commanders well, for Delrossa is a noble man, and Bartello a villain; but what of your Major?"

"He is a new man, senor, Don Ruiz

Valdos, a man who has lived in the United States for years, it is said."

"You knew that Bartello held my sister, the Senorita Agramonte, a prisoner?"

"Yes, senor, and her brother, a young Texan, as well as Mendoza, the overseer, and his family."

"He intended to have the young senor on the day following the attack of those terrible Texans the other night."

"Ah! He intended to kill the boy?"

"Yes, senor, and Mendoza also; but the Texans rescued them, though Major Valdos recaptured them on their way to the steamer."

"And they are his prisoners now?"

"And Colonel Bartello's, senor. But there is a rumor of a duello to be fought between Colonel Bartello and Major Valdos, though the reason is not known."

"It would be a good thing if it was a Kilkenny cat affair with the whole regiment."

"But let me know what force there is at the Wild Flower Plantation, and where situated?"

The Spaniard had thus far made a good impression in his story, and no one doubted but that he was telling the truth.

CHAPTER XII.

FOE OR FRIEND.

The Spaniard, in answer to the last question of Colonel Agramonte, said:

"At present, senor, Colonel Bartello's regiment occupies the plantation. It is eight hundred strong, and he has a battery of four light guns."

"Three hundred of the command are camped about the villa and the overseer's home, now burned, and there is one gun there."

"At the head of the lagoon two hundred men, with two guns are camped in a fortified part, and at the other end of the plantation, where the highways meet, the balance of the regiment and the other gun are stationed."

"A patrol is kept constantly on the move day and night between the three points."

"Then the regiment could be easily attacked and wiped out?"

"It could have been, senor, up to today; but Colonel Bartello has been sent two more regiments of infantry and a battery to reinforce him, and they are to fortify and hold the whole highway bordering the Wild Flower Plantation for a space of a dozen miles, for you know a curve in the coast there forms the whole estate into a promontory."

"Yes, it does, and as it is a good landing place for filibusters, it is just the place to fortify."

"But what do you know of the capture of Senorita Agramonte and the others after their escape?"

"It was the senor Don Valdos who retook them, senor."

"And they are prisoners at the villa?" and Rafael Agramonte's face grew hard as he feared he would hear that his young half brother had been shot and Mendoza also.

"Yes, senor."

"All of them?"

"Yes, senor."

"And the young American and Mendoza?"

"Are in irons in a room in the villa, senor."

"Still under sentence of death?"

"They have had their day of execution put off, senor, for several weeks."

"And the Senorita Lucita and Senora Mendoza?"

"Are in the villa, senor, and well treated."

"Why did you not join the Cubans, as your time of enlistment had ended?"

"I did not wish to be a deserter, senor, so awaited my discharge; but as I have been captured I would like to join the patriot ranks, senor."

"Did your regiment suffer much the night the Americans landed?"

"Fearfully, senor. My God! How those Texans fight!"

"Why, they alone could whip one regiment, battery and all!"

"They beat us back on all sides, and in their retreat carried their dead and wounded, while they fairly slaughtered us in our charges upon them as they boarded their steamer in the lagoon."

"Senor, I did not fire a shot, for I would not, my sympathy being with them, and when you see your sister she will tell you that Jose Mora, the Spanish soldier, told her when on guard in the villa one night that he would try and aid her escape."

"I believe you are telling the truth," said Agramonte, then he asked:

"Why did not Colonel Bartello guard the trails to this mountain camp?"

"He has them guarded now, senor, and had every other point patrolled; but he did not expect the landing of these desperate Americans."

"Why, senor, twenty thousand such horsemen could sweep this island from Cape Maysi to Cape Antonio, and make Captain General Weyler seek refuge in Morro Castle. Oh, senor! but they are fighters!"

"I have thirty of them here with me, and will hope for more; but you do not think another landing could be made upon the Wild Flower Plantation?"

"Those men can land anywhere, sir, and on a dark, stormy night a steamer could run in, for Spaniards do not keep a night watch then."

"Will there be any soldiers stationed at the lagoon?"

"No, senor. They depend upon the sentinels on the cliff to report an intended landing, and can rush troops to the head of the road to command the hill up which they have to come, and artillery is already there, or will be when the reinforcements arrive in the morning."

"Well, my man, you can go, and will be well cared for; but an attempt to escape will prove your death."

"Senor, in the morning I know I will find Cubans in your camp who will vouch for me, and prove to you that I am honest, the friend, not the foe, to Cuba."

"I hope so," and the Spaniard was led away to the guard-house, while Pilot Taos entered and said:

"His story is the same he told me, senor, and I believe he is honest. As it will be impossible now for you to rescue your sister and the others at the villa, Senor Rafael, I had better start to-night on my return to the coast, and thus be able to run out to-morrow night, as I believe we are going to have threatening weather."

"But your wounds, Taos, and you have had no rest."

"I slept day and night in the retreat, sir, and your surgeon can now dress my wounds, and I can start, for I would rather do so."

"And I will go with you, as I said," and an hour after, mounted on a fresh horse, Taos left the Cuban camp, Colonel Agramonte and his thirty cowboys accompanying him.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT THE PILOT SAW.

The coming of dawn found the pilot and his escort well down the mountain, and within a few leagues of the coast.

Colonel Agramonte was riding by his side, and behind came Stella, his beautiful Cuban wife, who had vowed to follow the fortune of her husband to victory or the bitter end.

She rode astride of the spirited little horse, and rode well, while in a belt about her slender waist were a pair of revolvers, and a machete hung by her side, a small repeating rifle being slung at her saddle horn.

Her costume was a picturesque one, for a sombrero of braided and pliable straw sheltered her head, and turned up in front, revealed a small Cuban flag upon the brim, held there by a Cuban miniature flag in silk.

She wore a jacket, silk blouse beneath it, a sash, short skirt of gray, and black leather leggings, with spurs upon her heels.

Behind her came four other women in the same dress, young, handsome, and determined, for they were the amazons of Cuba.

Then followed the thirty Cowboy Couriers, now armed with a long lance, in addition to their weapons and lassoes.

It was a band the Spaniards would not care to meet twice in battle, and the Americans, bronze-faced, determined, and daring, seemed anxious to find human game.

"You had better go no further, senor," said Taos; "I can get along well on foot from here," and knowing that it was better for the pilot not to attract attention, Colonel Agramonte called a halt just as the sound of hoofs were heard.

Instantly all was attention.

"You dismount, Taos, ready to go on your way, and I will see what is coming."

"Good-by, and luck to you," and the Cuban colonel grasped the hand of the pilot, who slipped from his saddle, and with a wave of his hand disappeared in the woods, for the rest of his way was to be continued on foot.

Reaching a point that gave him a good view for quite a distance, he beheld a score of Spanish cavalry riding at a trot along the highway and following a short distance behind was a light battery of four guns.

Then came a hundred or more pack animals, half a dozen ambulances, and some thirty more cavalry bringing up the rear.

"It is a Spanish convoy going to Bartello's camp. They more than double Colonel Agramonte's men, but he'll never miss the chance to capture those guns and such a quantity of supplies."

"I'll just wait here and see the result, for those Spaniards are marching up to trouble."

Hardly had the pilot spoken when there came a deafening crash of rifles, as thirty-odd opened fire at once, and then followed the rattle of the repeating Winchester, as they continued to pour deadly leaden hail in upon the Spanish cavalry.

For a minute only it lasted, but that was long enough for the pilot to see that the advance guard of Spaniards were swept from their saddles, though hardly a horse was hit, so true was the aim of the Texans.

He saw also that the artillerymen and rear guard were thrown into confusion by the sudden attack.

Then came the wild Texan yell, and the Cowboy Couriers, led by Rafael

The Cowboy Rescuers in

Agramonte, his wife by his side, swept down upon the convoy like an avalanche of death.

The shock was terrible. The Spaniards fired at random and went down before the irresistible onslaught.

Brave Maceo and his men were most dangerous to meet in a charge; but who were these wild horsemen that swept over them as though they were but bushes?

It was not a fight, but a death-dealing human cyclone, and the Spanish artillerymen, the guard, drivers, and all who were not killed sprang into the bushes and sped like deer down the steep hill in mad flight.

The pilot gave yell after yell of delight at what he saw, and waited only until the victorious Texans had circled around the guns, pack animals, and ambulances, and started all at a run up the mountain trail, and then he walked rapidly down the hill, crossed the scene of combat, and saw two-score of dead men, no wounded, and the whole convoy captured, while those who had saved their lives by flight were still running like deer in the direction of the camp of Colonel Bartello.

"If that's a specimen of American fighting, Colonel Agramonte learned well. I wish he had a hundred of such men.

"And to think how the Senora Agramonte rode into the thickest of the fight, her amazon guard right up with her!

"Well, the colonel's first fight is a good one, for that battery and those supplies are worth much to the patriots.

"And I don't believe the colonel lost a single man, and if such was the case, it will be like the Spanish reports always are, only reversed, many Spaniards killed and no Cubans hurt.

"But, I must hasten on," and the pilot did so.

CHAPTER XIV.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

Andrea Taos, the pilot, had been reared on the coast near the Wild Flower Plantation.

He knew the country well, and he was well aware that where he then was it was patrolled by Spaniards.

The convoy of Spaniards had evidently been trying to reach Colonel Bartello's camp with all dispatch, for they well knew that bands of patriots would be moving about after sunrise.

But, what they had most dreaded came to pass, as has been seen.

Hastening on, Taos kept in the woodland, avoiding the trails and roads.

At length he drew near the coast.

It was rugged and desolate at that point, but he knew there was a small and shallow inlet for small boats, and where a hamlet of fishermen had located.

It had been, in fact, his boyhood home, and he had passed his days in sailing up and down the coast, or gun in hand, hunting through the adjoining country.

Kinsfolk of his still dwelt there, though their occupation had been ruined by the war.

They were Cubans, and patriots at heart, too.

After noon he came to a range of hills looking down upon the coast and the gulf beyond.

He saw the little fishing village, nestled away on the beach, under the shadow of a bluff, and several little craft were at anchor there in the basin, yet with no one on board, and appearing as though they had not set sail for some time.

Going down the ridge, he approached

the bluff, and by a secret path made way to the little slope where the cottages stood, their garden in the rear, the white beach in front of them.

A few men and women were upon the beach, but avoiding being seen by these, Taos went to the largest of the cottages, approaching from the rear, and entered.

"Father!"

"My son!"

The pilot had seen his old father seated in an easy chair drawn up to the doorway.

"You have dared come home, Andrea, though you know the sentence of death hangs over you?" said the old man.

"I don't mind that, father, for I have seen too much of death in this struggle to fear it. Where is my mother?"

"Gone to a neighbor's."

"And my sister, Marcelite?"

"Out on the marsh, but her lover, Julio, is dead."

"Poor fellow!"

"The Spaniards killed him, we suppose, for he was captured."

"Another debt to pay them in like coin; but I am trying to leave the island, father—must do so to-night. I ran a steamer in last night, but was captured and escaped, so just came from the camp of Gomez."

"And you are wounded, my boy?"

"Only scratches, though one was a close call from death."

"You take great chances, Andrea; but how goes it with the noble Gomez, brave Maceo, and our people?"

"Well, indeed, father. We are in this struggle to win, mark my words!"

"But I can get your little craft to run out of the island in?"

"All I have is yours, Andrea. But who is with you?"

"I am alone. I will run out at dark, and I am glad to see a storm is coming up, so the night will be dark, and the Spanish cruisers hunting harbors."

"But where do you go?"

"To Key West direct—if the wind is fair I should reach port by daybreak."

"Yes, but I do not wish to see you go alone."

"That is nothing to me, father, for you know what I can do, and I know that the craft that bears me is as stiff as an ironclad."

"I'll get off the moment it is dark, and have water and supplies all ready to carry aboard."

"Yes, and I'll row out now and overhaul the Flying Fish, for things are a little musty aboard. Don't you show yourself, for one does not know who to trust now-a-days, my son."

The old man strolled out on the beach, while Taos set to work to get his supplies and fill a water cask for his run.

Going to a skiff, the old fisherman pushed it afloat and rowed out to a pretty little craft that looked as though she well deserved her name of Flying Fish, for she could fairly fly through rough waters, and was staunch and safe.

Ropes and sails were looked over carefully, and toward sunset the Flying Fish was ready for her master and supplies.

The skies were now heavy with clouds, the wind had risen, and though it was calm in the little basin, the gulf was running rough outside.

In the meantime the mother and sister of the pilot had returned home, and their delight was unbounded at finding him there.

They aided him in his preparations, and seemed anxious to get him out of the island, knowing as they did that he was a known rebel.

His sister, Marcelite, was a beautiful

an
Fish

light

pant crouc

ing the tiller in

The lights of a

mile away, but all was

foam, and a keen eye it

been that could have sighted

craft a few lengths away.

The wind was fair for the run, and

the Flying Fish ran into the harbor of

Key West just as the dawn began to

appear, and in a driving rain storm.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COWBOY CAPTAIN'S RESOLVE.

There were too many such boats in the waters of Key West for the Flying Fish to attract attention, especially for such a morning as was that on which she ran in at dawn.

Taos knew Key West well, so he ran to a secluded anchorage, and where a friend dwelt, a Cuban cigar maker, but a naturalized citizen of the United States.

He met a warm greeting, and as soon as he had breakfast started for the telegraph office.

There he sent a telegram to Captain Charles Chase, in care of his bankers, in the town near where the Texan and his Cowboy Couriers would land from the Mustang on their return.

The bankers were told to send a special messenger to meet Captain Chase, for they knew where he would land.

The dispatch was as follows:

"Arrived here just now.

"Others less fortunate. I start by rail to meet you. Hold Mustang until you see me. Return trip must be made to save life.

"PILOT TAOS."

"He will see that this is dated Key West, and it will explain that something is wrong and steamer must be held.

"I dare not make it more explicit, as these Spanish spies and Americans in Spain's pay even see our telegrams and letters," said Taos to his Cuban friend.

"You are right, Andrea, and already have I been asked while you were at the telegraph office, when your boat came in, and who was on board."

"I'll be bound the spies are moving around; but the steamer leaves within an hour for Tampa, and then I'll go flying by rail around the gulf coast for Texas."

This Taos did, and taking a small sailboat when he left the rail, he ran to the secluded harbor on the coast of Texas, where he knew the Mustang embarked and disembarked her crew of Cowboy Couriers.

It was not dawn when he put into the harbor, and to his joy he saw the lights of the steamer as she lay at anchor as close in shore as she could go.

The sail boat had been sighted, and he was hailed as he approached the steamer.

"I am Pilot Taos, and wish to see Captain Chase," he announced.

"Captain Chase has gone ashore. You will find him there."

To the beach the pilot ran, made a hasty landing, and saw that the cowboys were all hastening to depart.

Cowboy Rescuers in Cuba.

Under the Lone Star Flag, start for the mountain camps of the patriots.

He had rescued Hotspur Harry and the others, escaped to sea with his band, and now must learn that he had been deceived, that the little party rescued had not gone to the camp in the mountains with Rafael Agramonte, but had been entrapped by no less a person than the traitor to the clan, Don Ruiz Valdos.

A bitter foe he would be, and if Lucita and Hotspur Harry were in his power, Heaven help them, was his thought.

Valdos it had been who had doubtless heard him tell Hotspur Harry to go to the steamer, saying good-by to Rafael and the others awaiting at a certain spot.

Thus had he been able to capture them.

He it had been who had hailed the steamer as she backed out of the lagoon, and told him the party had gone on with Agramonte.

And an officer of Spain, as Taos told him he was, Valdos would now hold power to do as he pleased.

The more he thought of it, the more decided he was to return to the rescue and act quickly.

At once he called his men about him.

They had known, by the coming of Taos, that something had gone wrong.

In a few words he told them what had happened, and how bravely the wounded pilot had run the gantlet to the mountains, back again to the coast, then had come by his little boat to Key West, and so on to meet the steamer, arriving just in time.

"Men, I do not ask you to go back with me, for I do not have to, as each one will return, I know.

"The wounded can go to their homes, but the rest of you must at once go on a recruiting expedition, and lose no time about it, either.

"Each one of you know men of your own kind whom you can trust—cattlemen, ranchers, cowboys, who, though not members of our clan, are splendid fellows.

"You know, then, whom not to trust just as well; but I wish you to recruit with all haste, one, two, or three men to each of you.

"This will swell our force to a couple of hundred men, and we know what that many Texas cowboys can do, even with a few regiments of the dons.

"You know there is room on the Mustang for more, and she will readily carry several hundred of our horses.

"Now she is in the cattle business, clearing for Cuba direct, with horses, as you will see, and while she now runs to Galveston for coal, we will get our recruits and return here with them, say by the tenth, for that will give full time.

"The steamer will be fitted with full supplies, and nothing shall be left undone for the comfort of you all, and the full success of the expedition.

"As I am going to Galveston, I will go aboard now, with my horse, and Taos will accompany me, for we can arrange a plan on the way, as I desire him to return to Cuba to notify our old captain, Agramonte, and other comrades there, of our coming, and to reconnoitre the scene and let us know the exact situation."

The men were only too anxious to serve their captain, and get another "crack" at the Spaniards, while they would have taken any desperate chance to rescue Hotspur Harry, their Boy Bugler, and his beautiful sister.

They also had a revengeful desire to capture their traitor comrade, Don Ruiz Valdos.

After seeing his horse put on board by a flatboat, lowered from the steamer, and the men depart on their search for recruits, Captain Chase and Taos went out to the Mustang, which at once got up anchor and sped away for Galveston, unseen by any one, for the part of the coast where the cowboys embarked and landed was very lonely, and far from any ranch or habitation.

"You are willing to return to Cuba, Taos, are you not, though we really need you aboard the Mustang in running in again, and I could make the run, I guess, in your small boat."

"No, no, senor, I must go, for though you have been an American naval officer, and are a splendid seaman, it would be madness for you to go in a small boat to Cuba, without knowing those waters.

"We will arrange it all right, for I have a plan, senor, which you shall hear," answered Taos.

CHAPTER XVII.

TO CUBA.

The plan proposed by the Patriot Pilot was that he should take the train at once, on landing at Galveston, return at greatest speed to Key West, and then sail in his little boat, the Flying Fish, for Cuba.

He would arrange to run in at night to the little harbor, and, having left his Spanish sergeant's uniform at his parents' home, hidden away, he would don it and strike for the mountain camp of Gomez.

Once there he could explain all to Colonel Agramonte, and have him on the alert with a force to attack the same night that Captain Chase and his cowboys landed.

Upon his return from the mountains, still wearing his sergeant's uniform, he would reconnoitre the villa and its surroundings as well as he could, and discover just what the situation was there.

This done, he would return to his parents' home, and on the night of the landing, and which must be the first one of storm after a certain date, he would run out in the Flying Fish and watch for the Mustang's coming, to pilot her in, his father accompanying him, to take the little craft back.

Should he, Taos, be captured or killed, then his father would be on hand to run the steamer into the lagoon; or, if that could not be done without discovery, there was a point a league away which the Mustang could approach close to, into a small basin, and the landing could there be made, and the cowboys ride from there to the attack.

The plan was a good one, and Captain Chase decided at once that it was the best, but said:

"I believe you told me your father was quite an old man, Taos."

"He is, senor, yet in good health, and strong, while he is one of the best pilots on the coast."

"You know, senor, that father was well born, and rich once, but he was ruined by the Ten Years' War, and under sentence of death, so he sought a hiding place on the coast, and became a fisherman, to disguise himself, and he and my mother have educated my sister and myself, so we are not ignorant, like those good people among whom we dwell."

"I dislike having your father take the risk again that he must, and an old man, for he has suffered enough."

"He will be only too glad to do so."

"Is there no one to take his place, should harm befall you, Taos?"

CHAPTER XVI.

ONCE MORE FILIBUSTERS.

It was indeed a bitter thought for Captain Charlie, as the cowboys affectionately called their gallant leader, to feel that the one he loved, and her brother, the Boy Bugler of the clan, and the idol of the men, had been retaken by the Spaniards, after their escape.

He had done his part, made the landing, had seen Rafael Agramonte, his wife, and the brave cowboy volunteers

"They are honest people, and Cubans, among whom we dwell, señor, yet it is not safe to trust any one in Cuba now until they have been tried."

"But should my father even not be able to come, my sister would."

"Your sister!"

"Yes, sir, Marcelite, and though I, her brother, say it, as beautiful a girl dwells on Cuban soil, and that is a great deal to say in a land where women are so lovely."

"You are right there. But Taos, can your sister take your boat back?"

"As well as I can, señor; and more, if harm befalls me, and my father cannot come, she can run the steamer in equal to either of us, for she has been a sailor girl from her cradle, and has a nerve to do anything for Cuba Libre."

"Poor girl! She is now mourning for her lover, a fine young planter, who went with the Patriots, but was captured, and killed, father feels sure, though she has an abiding hope in his being alive."

"I sincerely hope that he may be."

It having been thus arranged, to avoid all mistakes and accidents, Andrea Taos took the boat ashore the moment the Mustang dropped anchor, Captain Chase accompanying him, and soon after he was rushing on the train for his destination.

Captain Chase at once went to his bankers to find out why the telegram had not been sent to him, and found that none had been received, and this Taos learned before his departure.

"Spanish spies," he muttered, and he was determined to know the reason his dispatch had miscarried, when he reached Key West.

With a coal merchant Captain Chase arranged for the Mustang to at once take on all she could carry, and a ship chandler supplied all the stores needed, Captain Chase paying for everything, for he fortunately had a long purse.

The mate of the Mustang had at once wired the owners in New Orleans that Captain Telfair had died at sea, and word came that a captain would at once be sent to take charge.

He arrived while the Mustang was coaling, and Captain Chase was delighted in finding in him an old naval officer and a man who had been the commander of a filibuster steamer in the Ten Years' War.

The name of the captain was Rudolph Somers. He was every inch a sailor, the very man for the dangerous work in hand, Charlie Chase was glad to know.

"The owners of the Mustang may suspect, but they do not say that they know what this vessel is doing, and are content, as long as they get their charter money, for her to be engaged in the gulf cattle trade, but she must be a good craft," remarked Captain Somers.

"There are none better for the service, for this, a racer, is stanch, and is of light draught, so we can run for it, weather any blow, and find easy landings," answered Captain Chase, and he added:

"I have found a number of old pards here to go with me, horses and all, and they go on board as cattlemen, of course."

"When will you sail, sir?"

"To-morrow morning, so as to reach the rendezvous with my cowboys by night."

And on time the Mustang put to sea; the rendezvous was reached, the Cowboy Rescue Couriers taken on board with their ponies, and the prow of the swift steamer was headed for Cuba once more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SECRET FOE.

The pilot reached Tampa on time, caught the steamer for Key West, and at once hastened to his Cuban friend's home.

The Flying Fish was there all aright, but the pilot was told that he had evidently been suspected, for several times the friend noticed Spanish spies hanging about, watching her.

"To fool them, I have run out in her a couple of times, with a party for a sail, and you had better go aboard now, while I fit her out for your run, and I'll get up another sailing party, and coming back you can land us at another point and then put out to sea after dark."

This plan suited Taos, and, asking his friend to go to the telegraph office and inquire about his message to Captain Chase, he at once went on board the Flying Fish.

Several hours after the Cuban cigar-maker came on board with his family and some friends, bringing supplies for the little craft, and, hidden in the cabin, Taos heard the Flying Fish put under way and stand out into the gulf.

As soon as he dared, he went on deck, for all were friends of Cuba Libre there, and his friend told him that the explanation at the telegraph office had been that a gentleman had come in with him, had changed the bill for the operator which he had offered at the office in payment for the dispatch, and also had gone out with the pilot, and thus was supposed to be a friend.

Within a minute he had returned and stated that his friend had just met the gentleman to whom he had wired in Galveston, so would not send the dispatch.

He was just in time, and the dispatch and money had been returned to him.

He was described as a Cuban in appearance, and Taos at once said:

"A Spanish spy. I was shadowed, but did not suspect it. I remember the man well, for I asked him where the office was, and he said he was going there and would show me."

"It was cleverly done, but shows how Spain has her spies right here on American soil."

After an hour's sail the Flying Fish ran in again, a landing was made just after dark, and, alone, Andrea Taos stood out to sea on his perilous mission.

Key West had almost been dropped out of sight, the lights astern growing more and more dim, and the Flying Fish, with a favorable breeze, was reeling off eight knots to the hour, when, in spite of his great nerve, Taos gave a start as he heard the words:

"Señor, you are my prisoner!"

The words came like a voice from the sky to the Patriot Pilot.

He had believed himself alone in the craft, leagues away from another human being.

His first thought was that some Cuban of the party, anxious to go to the island, had hidden on board when the others of the party left, but the words did not carry out that idea.

In moments of great danger a brave man thinks and acts quickly. Taos remembered that the forward hold was not locked. It had only a hatchway over it, and this was not battened down.

In that hold the fish were stored, when fishing, and it occupied one-half the length of the boat, the cabin and spacious cockpit the other half.

Over the cabin deck by the starlight

Pilot Taos saw a man leaning, a revolver in his hand, pointed directly at him.

But, coolly, the patriot replied:

"Well, shipmate, what can I do for you?"

He had been addressed in Spanish, and he replied in that language.

The man was evidently taken aback at the coolness of the man at the tiller.

That was just what the pilot wanted, for, suddenly releasing the tiller, he made a bound head first into the cabin!

There was a flash and a report, but the bullet missed its aim.

Once in the cabin Taos felt that the situation was more evenly divided.

He had a rifle there, shot a belt of revolvers, and he landed getting one of the latter back to the cabin entrance.

The Flying Fish, releasing her anchoring hand, ran up into the

It was blowing hard, the little craft rolled badly; she caught the other quarter and went to less about.

But the pilot did not worry. The craft was all right for the present, the foe aboard was to be looked after.

Not having heard a sound fired, the man forward began to think that he had killed the pilot, but he came aft with the greatest caution, stepping himself by the top of the cabin.

The pilot saw his legs as he passed, two bull's eyes on the starboard, so was on guard, and stood in the entrance awaiting his enemy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NIGHT GANTLET.

"You are my prisoner! Surrender! I will kill you!"

So called out the secret foe of the pilot as he leaned over the cabin.

There was no response.

"Ho within there!" cried the man.

All was silent.

"Say, I am no foe. I only said what I did to scare you, and did not shoot at you at all."

"I want to go to Cuba, so hid myself for I am one of the sailing party, and feared you would not take me."

Taos knew this to be a ruse to throw him off his guard. Not one of the party could have been left without some one else knowing it.

There were only seven in all, and a man could not have raised the forward heavy hatch and slipped into the hold without being seen, especially as it was hardly dark when the landing had been made.

Receiving no answer, the man muttered in Spanish:

"I guess I killed him."

"I'll try and see," and at once he peered over into the cabin below.

Taking aim, as the man peered into the cabin, Taos pulled trigger.

A shriek followed; and the man dropped into the cabin.

Lighting the cabin lamp, the pilot gazed upon his foe, who was dead, and Taos recognized the man who had gone to the telegraph office with him.

He searched him and found a number of papers, a well-filled purse, watch, two revolvers, and a long-bladed knife.

"He brought it upon himself, and dead men tell no tales. I must lose no time."

With this the pilot took the body on deck and threw it into the sea.

Then he put out his cabin light, lighted the binocular lamp to get his bearings, and once more put the Flying Fish upon her course.

The wind had increased, and the little craft fairly flew over the waters.

"She's making twelve knots an hour, if she's making one, and if the wind holds like this from its present quarter, I'll run the ninety miles by daybreak, and not have to stand off and on all tomorrow, waiting for darkness to run in."

"I'm certainly in luck."

With this the pilot devoted himself to the care of his vessel.

He would not reef, unless the wind grew stronger, and taking his course, he left the Flying Fish along at racing

He tried her nose at times, swooped with scuppers under again and spray dashed far up her

But, for the man who held his hand knew just what

One night the Flying Fish was passing two sailing vessels, but evidently not seen by them.

Line of the Cuban coast at sight, but still the craft

At times did Taos fear he would lay to and reef, but he took the and held on.

He seemed for a long time that the would not draw nearer, and the east already brightening with coming

At last, the unerring sailor saw bluffs above his coast home; he had the mouth of the inlet, and in the Flying Fish, her sails were spread as she sped along, her anchor let fall, and ere her momentum had died, the pilot had slipped into the water, the things taken from the Spaniard wrapped close in a rubber blanket, and a few bold strokes carried him ashore.

Quickly he ran for the shelter of his parents' little cottage, and just in time, for the east was growing brighter now, and the people of the hamlet would soon be astir.

Hiding in the foliage about the cottage, for he did not know what might have happened, Taos waited for half an hour, and then saw his father come out on the piazza and look about him.

"Does all go well, father?" he cried, as he heard the old man say: "Why, the Flying Fish is back at her anchorage!"

Another moment and Andrea Taos was beneath the roof of his home. He had safely run the night gantlet into Cuba once more.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FAIR SPY.

The pilot was warmly welcomed back by his parents and sister, and they could hardly believe that he had, in so short a time, gone through with so much.

He told his story in a modest way, and said that the Mustang and a large band of Texan cowboys would be on their way to Cuba very soon, if they had not already started.

"My duty is to first get to the mountain camps and see Colonel Rafael Agramonte, telling him of the arrangement with Captain Chase, but I must try and reconnoitre the Wild Flower Plantation before I go, and see what force is there and just how they are placed, for that will be important to know," said Taos.

"I will do that for you, Brother Andrea," quietly said Marcelite.

"You?"

"Yes."

"Colonel Bartello sent over here to the hamlet and asked to have fish sup-

plied the villa daily, and father, though not caring to serve the Spaniards, even for their gold, at once saw a chance to make discoveries, and undertook to do so.

"He has twice gone there with fish, for he borrowed Manuel Lopez's boat, and last evening he made a good catch to take over this morning."

"As they keep their eye on him, he has been able to discover but little; but I will go, and—"

"Why, Marcelite, I would not hear of such a thing, for the moment they saw you they—"

"Wait, Andrea, and hear me! They would not see me, for I will go as a fisher lad, and my large fishing coat, a pair of your pants down to fit, boots, an oil-skin cap, short hair, and a dirty face will make me a good specimen of a boy of fifteen."

"And you mean to sacrifice your beautiful hair?"

"It is but little to sacrifice, when so many give up life!"

"Come, mother, you alter these pants to suit me. I'll get Andrea to cut off my hair, and—"

"Which Andrea will not be guilty of."

"Then mother will."

"Yes, my child, I will! for now we must show by our actions that we love Cuba."

"You, my son, have just risked your life, and we can so disguise Marcelite there will be little risk, I am sure."

"Husband, you can get the Lopez boat ready, and run it around to where none of the people will see Marcelite get in, and she will go aboard where you land."

Andrea Taos saw that his mother and sister were determined, and that his father did not say nay, and so he yielded, while he greatly admired Marcelite for her pluck.

He told her just what he wished to find out, and then he turned to the papers and other things he had taken from the body of the Spaniard whom he had killed on the Flying Fish.

In looking them over he was not long in discovering that the man was a Spanish spy, in the pay of the consul of Spain, and also serving the United States in the same capacity.

There were telltale papers that made the Cuban pilot feel that he had rendered Cuba a much greater service than he had dreamed of at first, for there was a full report of discoveries made by the spy regarding the Cubans, but not yet turned in.

"I will turn them all over to Colonel Agramonte, and then they should be sent to our friends in Key West."

"By killing that man much good has been done our cause, I am glad to see. He went aboard the Flying Fish to capture me when I boarded, but the coming of the party made him wait, and when at last he did make the attack I was fortunately too quick for him," said Andrea to his parents and sister in explanation.

After a couple of hours, Marcelite was ready for her daring venture. Her beautiful dark hair had been cut short, her face had been blotched here and there with black, and her exquisite teeth had been discolored, so that they were no longer attractive.

Then with a storm suit, rubber boots, her father's cut-down pants, and an oilskin tarpaulin pulled down over her eyes, she was certainly the picture of a saucy-looking fishing lad of fourteen.

She slipped out of the cottage by the rear garden, skirted along the base of the cliff, turned it, and at a point beyond saw her father waiting.

She was soon in the boat, her father telling her he would await her there, so she could return in the same way.

Up the coast, just beyond the breakers, ran the little skiff, skillfully handled by the young girl, and running into the lagoon, after a sail of over a league, she landed, shouldered her basket of fish, and started up to the villa.

There was no one at the lagoon landing, but at the hilltop, where the road entered the villa grounds, there was a piece of artillery and a sentinel, with a small camp, showing that there were a number of soldiers camping there at night.

Upon the cliff, near the ruins of the overseer's home, was a camp of fully a hundred men, and a mate to the gun at the hilltop.

Outside of the handsome entrance to the grounds of the villa from the highway, the fair spy counted fully two hundred Spanish infantry, and they had two guns in position, commanding the approach.

Back of the villa was a large camp, in which were cavalry, artillery, and infantry, fully a thousand men, she considered, in looking it over.

In front of the villa were two more guns in position, and to one side a camp of infantry and cavalry.

"They have two thousand men here surely, and perhaps more that I do not see; but I must find that out," she muttered, as she went along.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT MARCELITE DISCOVERED.

The sentinel at the hilltop had seen no harm in the fisher lad and his large basket of fine fish for the officers at the villa.

Especially had he been pleased when Marcelite told him that her father could not come, and then, expressing pity for him, had given him two of the best fish in the basket for his dinner.

This won the sentinel, and he said:

"If you could only get me a loaf of the wheat bread the officers only receive, I'd remember you, my lad, for it would go well with these fish."

"I'll try to."

"The cook would give you a loaf."

"I'll do my best, captain," answered Marcelite, and being called captain made the soldier grin with delight.

"That's my man," muttered Marcelite, as she went on to the villa.

She had often been there before, for Stella Agramonte had been struck with the beautiful daughter of the old fisherman, and shown her many favors, as had also Lucita.

Going around to the rear of the villa, unchallenged by the sentinels, she found the cook was the old negress who had served the Agramontes, and had been kept in her place by Colonel Bartello.

Marcelite knew that the negress was as true as steel to the Agramontes and the Cuban cause, for she had a son serving under Maceo, though this fact was not known to the Spaniards, or she would not have been trusted.

She handed over her fish, fresh from the trap, and the negress, Donna, eyed her curiously.

"I'm all right, Donna—I'm Marcelite Taos," whispered the girl.

The effect was electrical. The negress laughed and cried, squeezed Marcelite's hands until they ached, and after half an hour passed there, the fair spy started upon her return, and the basket was well supplied.

She went to the hilltop, and she was disappointed to find her sentinel gone,

for the relief guard had been on its rounds; but she was told that the other sentinel was off duty and awaited at the boat for her, and the soldier added:

"It's all right, I'll be his comrade."

Down to the boat went Marcelite, and there was the sentinel. She opened her fish basket, and tacked up securely within were a couple of loaves of wheat bread, a bottle of wine, and a jar of preserves.

"I feel sorry for you soldiers, who are sent here to Cuba, and I just got these from the cook, so will give them to you."

The soldier could have hugged the supposed boy with delight, but to Marcelite's great joy, he did not make the attempt.

He was only too glad to sit down and talk with Marcelite, who promised to bring him more things to eat, and it was fully an hour before the little boat and its girl helmsman ran out of the lagoon on its way, back to the hamlet harbor.

Her father was waiting for her, having grown most anxious at her long stay; but she leaped ashore, while he took the boat around, and, going around the cliff, she entered the cottage unseen, to find her mother and brother pale with anxiety about her.

"I'm all right, and I just wish to tell you what I have found out, and I got it from two different sources."

"Colonel Bartello is in full command about here, and he has eight guns, six-pounders and twelves, and I know where each one is stationed."

"He has his own regiment of cavalry, six hundred strong, two regiments of infantry of twelve to thirteen hundred soldiers, and the batteries, with Banguo's guerilla band of a hundred men, and they guard the roads to the mountains."

"In all, he has about two thousand two hundred men, and from outpost to outpost on the Wild Flower Plantation, and the force immediately around the villa, he could bring all into action within an hour's time."

"Now to the prisoners."

"He has confined in the villa the Senorita Lucita, her quadroon maid, Flora, Senora Mendoza, the latter's child, and in a wing in the rear are the Senor Harry and Mendoza, the overseer."

"The Senorita Lucita and her maid are allowed to go at will about the villa and grounds, for Colonel Bartello is in love with her and hopes some day to marry her."

"If she does not marry him, then her brother, the Senor Harry, is to be shot as a rebel."

"The major of the regiment is your traitor Texan, Don Ruiz Valdes, you told us about, Brother Andrea, and he also is in love with the Senorita Lucita, so he and Colonel Bartello are to fight a duel about her, I learned, for the villa cook, Donna, told me all, and I got much more news from a sentinel."

"Now, brother, have I done well?" asked the disguised girl, proudly.

"Nobly! I could not have discovered anything in comparison."

"I'll show you just what rooms the prisoners are in; and more, just where each camp of the Spaniards is, and the force there," and with pencil and paper Marcelite drew a map of the plantation, a plan of the villa, and handed it to her brother, who said:

"I start for the mountain camp to-night."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PILOT'S REPORT.

Andrea, the patriot true heart, rested through the day, for he was to have a night tramp of it to the mountains, of over thirty miles, and he had already spent the night before running the gantlet in the Flying Fish.

After a good supper he set out just at dark on his long walk.

He went as he had come, by way of the bluff, and carried along his Spanish uniform, to don, did he have to run the gantlet of any soldiers of Spain.

But fortune favored him, and though, as he crossed the highway, a Spanish patrol passed along, he was not seen, crouching in the bushes, but both heard and saw the Spaniards, for they were talking of what a surprise they would give the cowboys, did they attempt to attack them, or to land another force, as they, the Cubans, did not know that their force had been almost quadrupled in number, in addition to which they had artillery and infantry.

Andrea smiled grimly, and went on his way when the Spanish patrol had passed on down the road, chattering like monkeys.

Continuing to press on, the pilot reached a point where he could have a fine view of the coast and the gulf beyond.

"The weather will be threatening now for a month or more, so the Mustang won't have to wait long for a bad night to run in."

"I am full to the chin of news for Colonel Rafael Agramonte, and he'll act for the best, I know. If I do not get back to the coast, my brave sister will be the Mustang's pilot, so there can be no mistake, anyway."

So musing, the Patriot Pilot pushed on untiringly, and just as the east grew rosy with the coming up of the sun, he came to the first patriot outpost.

He at once told the guard that he was hastening on to see Colonel Agramonte with important news, and was told that his camp was a couple of miles further on.

He was given a horse to ride, and, as he went along, escorted by a Cuban soldier, he could see that the way had been well strengthened in works and outposts, and a surprise of the camp could not be made by the Spaniards.

Colonel Agramonte had just come out of his quarters as the pilot appeared, and gave a hearty welcome as he saw him, but said:

"So you were not able to get away from the island, Taos?"

"Oh, yes, senor, and return. I accomplished all that I went for and more."

Senora Agramonte was hastily called, and while waiting for breakfast the Cuban colonel and his wife heard the story that Andrea Taos had to tell.

"You have done nobly, my good friend, and as soon as you have breakfast, I wish you to ride with me to General Gomez's quarters, for President Cisneros is there, and they must hear all."

"I have my cowboys here, a company of amazons, thirty strong, of which my wife is captain, and Major Leonardo's battalion of scouts, three hundred strong. We guard the approach to the camps, and have one gun here, also; but I can get a reserve force with my own, to make that swoop down upon Bartello's camp the night the Mustang runs in, and Captain Chase and his Cowboy Couriers can attack the villa and make the rescue, from which I will have drawn the Spaniards to fight me, for I will make a show of attacking the line."

"Thus you see, Taos, by your splendid work, what we can do."

"Yes, senor, and Captain Chase told me to tell you that his intention was to remain in Cuba, with half of his cowboys, at least, and fight under the Lone Star Flag."

"I really hope he will not, but will return to Texas with Lucita and Harry; but, should he be determined to remain, I will see that he gets a colonel's commission to start with, for he is a natural-born soldier, as well as sailor, and would be a great addition to our struggling army."

"Now tell me, Taos, should aught happen to you, in running the gantlet to the coast, what would we do, for the Mustang could not run in."

"Oh, yes, senor, she could! My sister Marcelite, whom you and Senora Stella both know, is to watch for her coming, going out in the Flying Fish the first night of storm."

"And your father will pilot the Mustang in?"

"Oh, no, senor, for we refuse to allow father to risk anything, after all he has gone through, and in his old age. Marcelite will go."

"And be the pilot?"

"Yes, senor."

"I know that she is a perfect sailor, but—"

"I'll trust her, Senor Colonel."

"Then that settles it, for if you trust her with the task, I feel that she can do it. Now we'll start for headquarters."

As Taos was seen by the Texas cowboys with their colonel, he was given three rousing cheers, for they well knew that there was important work ahead when they saw the return of the Mustang's pilot.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PLOT.

The camp of General Gomez was visited by Pilot Taos, with Colonel Agramonte, the latter being escorted only by his amazon bodyguard.

The pilot looked at the faces of the women soldiers, and saw there only stern determination to do their duty as far as they might.

Some of them were as young as their captain, Stella Agramonte, a number of them almost as beautiful in face and form. Others showed how they had suffered, and a number of them had lost husbands, brothers, fathers, lovers, in fact, all that they had held dear, and had devoted their lives to Cuba Libre.

They had shown their mettle in more than one engagement, and the Spaniards had begun to fear them.

In capturing the Spanish convoy, as he had, Colonel Agramonte had seen that women dare go where men did; and more—that they could bring a machete down with deadly force. They could also fire rifle and revolver with deadly aim, and were ready to die as men did.

The convoy was a splendid haul, of guns, ammunition, rifles, and much needed supplies, while he had almost wiped out the Spanish escort.

The handsome young Cuban-American, for he had become a citizen of the United States while living in Texas, had won laurels for himself by his brilliant services already.

At headquarters he was ushered into the presence of General Gomez, the pilot accompanying him.

Maceo was not there, having moved off to the westward to establish a camp further in the Spanish lines.

That stern old warrior, Gomez, gave the pilot cordial greeting, and presented

him to a small man, well-formed, quick in movement, and with a massive head and face of much force and character.

It was President Salvador Cisneros.

He had expressive eyes, wore a full beard, and looked the man to be at the head of the Patriot Government of a people struggling for independence, for freedom from the most tyrannical nation on earth, bar none.

The pilot greeted the president with due respect, and at the request of Rafael Agramonte told his story.

All listened most attentively, and then General Gomez said:

"When will the filibuster steamer be in?"

"The first night of storm, Senor General, after the fifteenth of this month."

"And this is the eleventh."

"Yes, senor. She will hardly be off the coast before the thirteenth or fourteenth, and will then stand off and on, with the island just in sight, awaiting a blow and dark night."

"Then you must be ready, Colonel Agramonte, for the same night."

"Yes, senor."

"I will give you what men you need."

"Thanks, general, a couple of troops and two guns will do, beside my own force, for I am to make feint attacks, as it were, to draw the Spaniards to their inland lines, while Captain Chase lands with his Cowboy Couriers and makes a dash to the rescue of the prisoners in the villa."

"With two guns at different points, and the force I name, I can make Colonel Bartello and his men believe a much larger number is about to attack him, and that will draw his men from the villa."

"You are right, and you can have what men you wish. But, would it not be well to make an attack in force?"

"Not if we wish to save the villa, Senor General, and keep a force of Spaniards there."

"Again you are right. You, Pilot Taos, are to return to the coast, and bring the Mustang in?"

"Yes, general."

"And explain the situation on this side?"

"Yes, Senor General."

"There must be some agreement as to the time of attack."

"I will leave it to my sister, senor, to pilot the Mustang in, while I will watch from the bluffs, and then run across to the highway, where I will meet Colonel Rafael and let him know."

"Should the steamer not come in, he can withdraw his force unseen, and await until she does arrive."

All was made plain as to just what was to be done by each party, afloat and ashore, and both President Cisneros and General Gomez seemed much impressed by the fact that the Patriot Pilot would trust his sister, a young girl, to bring the Mustang in to land the cowboys.

But Colonel Agramonte vouched for it that she was to be trusted, and the pilot soon after started for the cowboys' camp, to await until night, when he would again run the gantlet to the coast.

After a good rest, he started at sunset, carrying a bundle of important papers to be sent back on the Mustang, and addressed to the Junta in New York.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FOES TO THE END.

It is now time to return to the villa, and see how Hotspur Harry, Lucita, and the Mendozas have fared there.

They had been carried back to the villa

by Major Don Ruiz Valdos in great triumph, for he felt that he had accomplished much over his superior, Colonel Bartello.

The latter being in command, was the one to be blamed for the rescue of his prisoners and the surprise of his camp by the landing party of Americans.

The fact that he, Don Ruiz Valdos, had recaptured the prisoners was a feather in his cap he intended to make the most of.

So back he went, to find Colonel Bartello again in possession of the villa, and pacing up and down his room like an enraged lion, while couriers were coming in with their reports to him that the filibuster steamer had escaped to sea.

Leaving his prisoners under guard, Don Ruiz entered the quarters of Colonel Bartello, and was greeted in no pleasant mood by his superior, whom he had arranged to meet in a duello in a few more hours.

Valdos was a very shrewd man, and he had begun to consider the situation from a new standpoint. Should he kill Colonel Bartello, he would doubtless be ordered away from the very scene where he wished to remain.

Again, with reinforcements coming, should he remain, with his rank as a major, he would find himself under some officer who would come with his regiment and outrank him.

He believed he could handle Bartello, the latter had good influence with the captain general, and so he would work to have matters remain as they were for the present.

With his hold upon the colonel of having recaptured the prisoners, he had him in his power, so to speak.

For these reasons, with a change of heart, he now sought out Colonel Bartello.

The latter fairly glared at him when he entered, and hissed forth:

"Where were you, senor, when duty demanded that you should lend me your aid?"

"Dismiss these officers, Senor Colonel Bartello, and I will tell you," was the calm response.

The officers present were dismissed; then Major Valdos said:

"I was driven to my room by an overwhelming force, Colonel Bartello, and I heard the rescue of the prisoners and the order for them to go at once, mounting what horses they found outside, to the steamer, but to go by the outer gate on the highway, where Senor Rafael Agramonte and a force awaited to bid them farewell before going to the mountain camps of the rebels."

"I at once leaped from the window, for I had barred myself in my room, mounted a horse, and collecting a few of our men, went to the spot appointed."

"Going ahead alone, I called to Agramonte that all was well, but not to wait, and, seeing him depart with his cowboy band, I stationed my men in the woods and when the prisoners came up, in charge of a Cuban, I recaptured them."

"The Cuban I killed, but all of the prisoners are safe without."

"Valdos, I humbly ask you to pardon my hasty words, for you certainly accomplished wonders."

"Those American cowboys fight so like devils they put my men to flight, and I had to run for my life, also."

"The cowboys got back to their steamer, and the party you speak of, will reach the mountain camps, but I will report this fight as a victory for us, for the vessel has gone, and she certainly had no time to land munitions of

war, while we must have killed many of them."

"Very few, Colonel Bartello, while scores of Spanish soldiers fell, for I know how those Texas cowboys fight, having been with them in their own land."

"But, let me say to you, senor, that I, for one, am anxious to serve you, and to do so we must sink personal feelings, at least for the present."

"We must end this duello where it is, and act together, or, as I happen to know, your command will be ordered away from here."

"That I should by no means like, senor don; but how can this all be ended honorably?"

"We can send for our seconds, Senor Colonel, explain to them that an affair between the colonel and his major at this time would be most demoralizing to the men, and that the duel shall be declared off for the present, and a temporary peace between us take place, for duty to Spain demands it."

"I am more than willing; but about your claim upon the hand of Senorita Lucita Agramonte?"

"I do not relinquish it, Senor Colonel, but I will make no claim until both you and I are firm in our positions here beyond removal."

"And I will do the same, Don Ruiz Valdos."

"But what of the execution of that boy and the overseer?"

"It must not be done."

"But—"

"Do you expect to win favor by killing that boy? And more as he is an American, even though a filibuster, it may cause our Government trouble to have him shot without trial."

"But the overseer?"

"The Senorita Agramonte thinks most highly of him, Senor Colonel, and it will be best to simply put off the executions, as we have our duello, and await to see what may turn up."

"Then we can be guided in all by circumstances. Give Senorita Lucita and her maid the freedom of the grounds, treat the boy and Mendoza more kindly, and matters will shape themselves either to your advantage or mine, for both of us cannot wed the Senorita Agramonte, and when our duel is fought the survivor will enjoy the benefit of what you now do."

Colonel Bartello looked steadily into the eyes of the bold speaker, and said:

"Major Valdos, you have done a good thing in recapturing the prisoners, and you suggest just what I shall do in my treatment of them, while, like you, I do not lose sight of our duel, and at a future day it will be for one of us to win, you or I."

"Until that day we are at peace, and, though rivals, must appear friends."

So it was that matters rested in the villa while the Cuban plotters were busy without.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE NIGHT OF THE ORDEAL.

The pilot, Andrea Taos, reached the coast in safety, and once more entered his home on the basin, just as the dawn was breaking.

Refreshed by a bath and good breakfast, he told his parents and sister of his visit to the patriot camp, his meeting with the President and General Gomez, and just how he had arranged with Colonel Rafael Agramonte the plan of action when the Mustang should run in.

Then he added:

"And, Marcelite, you are to be the pilot of the Mustang."

"I will not shrink from the duty, brother," was the plucky reply.

"Father will sail you out in the life skiff, and then run home again, after he has put you on board, and my advice will be that you go in your sailor's garb as a fisher boy."

"I will."

"I will give you a note to Captain Chase, and you can bring the steamer in to the point, for the horses can be thrown overboard there and swim ashore, and the men catch them as they land. You know the secret path to the grounds of the villa, which comes out near the road to the lagoon."

"I know it well, brother."

"You can guide Captain Chase and his cowboys that way, and once they reach the grounds, they will know what to do, so you can quickly make your way back home."

"I will, brother; but, the steamer?"

"I will join Captain Chase and guide him back in his retreat to the steamer, for I go to sea with the Mustang, to run in other expeditions. I am sure this will not be the last one our good American friends send us."

"I hope not, most sincerely, brother; but, I understand all I am to do now, and will not fail you."

"I feel assured of that. The moment I see from the bluff that you have brought the steamer into harbor, I will start across to communicate with Colonel Agramonte. Then he will commence his attack. That will take nearly all the Spanish from the villa, as they will not be looking for a steamer to come in."

"I will meet the cowboys where you leave them, and if half can capture the villa, and rescue the prisoners, the others, those who are to go with Colonel Agramonte back to the mountains, can join his forces there, carrying the ammunition they are to bring in quantities with them on pack horses, for all that will be arranged."

Thus was the whole plan laid out, and all the pilot and his fair sister had to do was to await the coming of the steamer bearing the Rescue Couriers.

The days passed, and the night appointed fortune favored, for the late hours came on dark and stormy, and just at sunset from the bluff, Taos had seen a smoke far off on the horizon.

Watching, he had seen it double and go back over its track.

This was the signal agreed upon with Captain Chase. The Mustang was on time, and ashore all was in readiness for her coming.

Just after dark fell Felipe Taos and his daughter left their home, and, entering the stanch life skiff, put out to sea, Andrea being already at his post upon the bluff.

The desperate play of life and death was at hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

Without a hitch the plans put in motion for the landing and rescue went on, and the separate actors in the night tragedy well did their duty.

Marcelite was put on board the Mustang, in spite of the wild seas running; her father returned in safety to his home; Andrea Taos saw the landing begun, and, hastening to the rendezvous, found Rafael Agramonte there, with his men in position all along the Spanish line.

Told that the Mustang had done her

duty, Colonel Agramonte began work by throwing a shell into the Spanish outpost nearest to him. This was the signal for a feint attack all along the line, to become real where it could be made so by loss to the Spaniards.

Without a hitch the plans of the patriots and the Cowboy Rescuers were carried out.

The attack of Colonel Agramonte was made, to draw the Spaniards away from the villa and their camps, in the belief that a large insurgent force from the mountains had come down to attack them. Under cover of this ruse the Texan Rough Riders landed from the Mustang, made their way to attempt the rescue of those for whom they were risking so much.

Straight to the rendezvous appointed with her brother Marcelite led the cowboys, and, having done this, she drew back to the shelter of a grove of palms, to await the result.

Andrea Taos at once reported to Captain Chase the exact situation, that the way to the villa was clear, and few Spaniards were there to defend it.

The Texan force was then divided. Those cowboys who had volunteered to remain upon the island and fight for Cuba Libre were massed upon one flank to join Rafael Agramonte as soon as the bold move had been accomplished; while the main band was to dash on to the villa, and woe be unto the Spanish soldier who opposed their way!

With an irresistible swoop, which they had learned upon the plains of Texas, the cowboys were led by Captain Chase to the villa—the few guards suspecting them to be Spanish cavalry, until they learned to their sorrow that they were not.

It did not take Captain Chase and his men long to free Hotspur Harry, Lucita, and their fellow-captives from their hateful prison. That done the volunteers were started on their way toward the Cuban lines to join Col. Agramonte, while back to the steamer went the retreating Cowboy Rescuers.

In safety the Mustang was reached, but the horses had to be left behind, as they could not be taken on board with the Spaniards now pressing on hard to endeavor to retrieve their defeat and losses by making a capture of the blockade running steamer and her gallant crew and guard.

Out to sea stood the Mustang, escaping the Spanish soldiers on shore and the Spanish enemies afloat. Her sharp prow went swiftly through the waves, and her course was once more homeward bound!

The Texans who had remained to cast their destiny with the Cuban patriots, as we have said, had started for the mountain camps of Gomez; but their retreat was not to be a bloodless one, for the Spanish cavalry, maddened by their defeat, and determined to cut off the retreat of the cowboys, started in reckless pursuit.

"The Spanish cavalry are pursuing in heavy force, Colonel Agramonte, led by Don Ruiz Valdos himself," cried a cowboy scout of the rear guard, dashing up and joining Rafael Agramonte.

"We will bar their way! Dash to the front, Mowbray, and send back every man that can be spared."

"I will lead those now with me back to meet the Don and his men," cried the brave Agramonte, and his followers gave a cheer. They were ready for the fray!

The day had dawned, and as Colonel Agramonte wheeled and led the way at a run back on the trail, Handsome Matt Mowbray dashed away to obey his lead-

er's orders, his cowboy comrades greeting him as he passed them with cheers and waving of sombreros.

But the Spaniards had had too severe a taste of what the Texans were in battle to press them too hard; while, also, the traitor Don may have had an idea that he was risking too much in crowding his old comrades. The pursuing cavalry evidently were satisfied with the first rebuff to let the retreating force go on its way, and the patriot camps were reached in safety.

As to the Rescuers on the Mustang, they safely reached port, and in spite of their experience in running the blockade of Spanish cruisers, all were ready and anxious to again follow their brave captain in another expedition to the Ever Faithful Isle.

In truth, there to-day the dashing riders are fighting bravely in the patriot ranks, and have gained the name of the Mounted Man Killers of Cuba, for the Spaniards who face them know just what to expect.

THE END.

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